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—E cælo descendit γνωθι σεαυτον.

JUV. Sat. ix.

"EACH heart," says the great Lavater, "is a world of nations, clapes, and individual; full of friendships, enmities, indifferences; full of being and decay, of life and death: the past, the present, and the future; the springs of health and engines of disease: here joy and grief, hope & fear, love & ~~hatred~~ hate, fluctuate, & toss the sullen & the gay, the hero and the coward, the giant and the dwarf, deformity and beauty, on ever restless waves. You find all <u>within</u> yourself that you find <u>without</u>: the number and character of your friends within

has an exact resemblance to your external ones; and your internal enemies are just as many, as inveterate, as irreconcileable, as those without; the world that surrounds you is the magic glass of the world, and of its forms within you; the brighter you are yourself, so much brighter are your friends; so much more polluted your enemies. Be assured then, that to know yourself perfectly, you have only to set down a true statement of those that ever loved or hated you." *

Such are the remarks of a deep and accurate observer of human nature; of one, who seems to have penetrated into the secret springs of the heart, & to have noticed every trait of feeling, of character and of countenance with close

* See his "Aphorisms", No. 508.

scrutiny. And true indeed it is, that we may all discover in our hearts an immense tract of country, whose dark features are ever apparent; but whose gentler scenes are hid from the view sometimes even of ourselves. The wilderness of nature is not so dreadful and so hopeless as the wilderness of the heart; and the fairest gardens of even Arabesque invention fade before the superior lustre of the beauties we may behold in that "little world the human mind." If then all without be but a representation of all within; if external objects attract & repel, or are attracted & repelled, according to the operations of our own bosoms; if there is this sympathy in human kind, this correspondence of view, we ought none of us, being aware of this, to be mistaken

with regard to our own characters. But the misfortune is, that the rule, though a good one, will not hold universally true. Strange and inconsistent, varying from one extreme to another, the heart of men can seldom sympathise. The delusions of hope, of fortune, of fancy, are perpetually sending their breezes, which balmy as they may seem, cloud the prospect, & distort the true appearance of things. If we behold ourselves hated by the bad, shunned by the malevolent, deserted by the envious; but beloved by the good, & cherished to the hearts of the better part of mankind, we may reasonably conclude, that there is something in our own character which approximates to that of the last mentioned

class. But even here we are liable to be mistaken. The sympathy of sorrow, the success of fortune, and a thousand other adventitious circumstances may throw a splendid veil over our defects, and procure for us the esteem of the good, & the envy of the bad. On the other hand, if we become objects of aversion to those whose good opinion we would desire, and are claimed as kindred spirits by the weak, and the vicious, we ought, by our rule, to conclude ourselves to be so much like the latter, that we require an immediate renovation of character and principle; but how often are the good themselves deceived by external appearances; how often do they neglect or refuse to give credit to the virtues we may possess; and how often do the

wicked and malevolent circumvent with their artful flatteries the brightest character, that it may be reduced to their own degraded level, or for other purposes, which might easily be pointed out in the black catalogue of human crime. In particular instances therefore, this rule will not hold good, although we have little doubt, that as a general principle it might be found to ~~be~~ come pretty near the truth, in the retrospective view of a long life spent amongst the stirs, & noise & bustle of the busy and ever fluctuating world. At the close of life, when the mind travels back again over the time that has past, recalls the years that have flown away with often too rapid wing, remembers the buddy

of hope, the stings of disappointment, the delights of friendship, and the poisoned shafts of malevolence, it will probably be generally found, that the friendships & enmities contracted, bear too strong a resemblance to the internal feelings of the heart, to be mistaken.

But do we not continually labor under mistaken views and notions of each other's characters? In the course of life, are we not continually shocked with the developed blackness of hearts which once seemed bright with every thing which can adorn and dignify human nature? The characters against which we have formed a prepossession, are often stripped of their black & deleterious veil, and represented in their own

resplendent colors. But we often go through life deceived till the day of death; & die under mistaken ideas of those with whom we have had to do. The clouds of prejudice will oftentimes still obscure the characters we had otherwise loved & honored; the schemes of flattery, the cloak of duplicity, remain undiscovered, while the dagger is planted by hands unseen in the bosom that trusts to its murderer and its betrayer. How then can we ever precisely determine by this means our own character? It is impossible and whoever acts upon this principle, must ever be liable to mistake, & doubt; to improper ideas, or galling uncertainty. While human nature remains as it is,

no such beneficial result as has been fondly anticipated can be reasonably expected; and however beautiful the theory of the great Lavater may be, & however plausible on general principles, yet, in the practice of his rule, we shall only find

"That shadows clouds & darkness rest upon us."

Now then, are we to arrive at a definite knowledge of our own characters? If all human means are uncertain, where shall we look for assistance? — Such are the questions of frail & fallible mortality; but there comes from an immortal source a voice which exclaims — ~~communne~~ "Stand in awe, and sin not; commune with your own heart upon your

bed, and be still." — In the hour of silent contemplation, when this world and all its vain pursuits are shut out, let us look into our hearts, and behold their contents ourselves. If we begin the search with a stedfast trust in heaven, & a sincere & resolute mind for amendment, our search will not be vain; aid will be given us from above. We shall behold and be shocked at the blackness and the pollution of that heart we fondly hoped was the seat of every virtue; but we shall be enabled to look to better things; the virtues we do posess will be purified and exalted; our passions refined, our affections and our desires cleansed from all earthly

drops, and fixed on heaven. It is in vain that the blasphemer and the irreligious, or the indifferent pilgrim through this vale of tears, endeavor to examine their own characters. Puzzled in the search, they yield either to gloomy misanthropy, or to unbounded arrogance; to a disgust for themselves and all mankind, or to a proud & wayward conceit of their own powers, & their own attainments; — but the man who claims the aid of heaven, sees himself in his true colors, feels the sunshine of joy illumine his heart, and experiences that expansion of mind, and that extension of affection to

all mankind, which claim at once their esteem, their love, their veneration. From heaven, it may indeed be truly said, descends alone the true secret how to KNOW THYSELF.

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